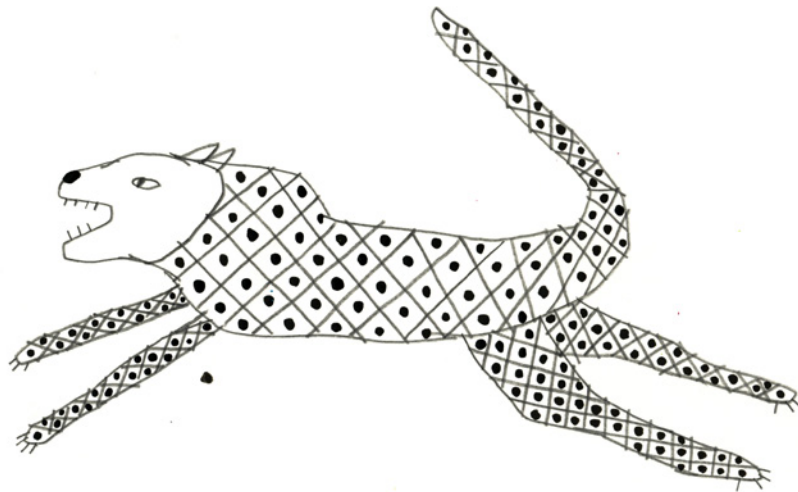


Five Dials



NUMBER 23

JAVIER MARÍAS 5 *Hating The Leopard*

... and nothing more.



CONTRIBUTORS

JAVIER MARÍAS is the author of sixteen works of fiction, twelve of which have been translated into English. His work has been translated into forty languages in fifty countries and more than six million copies of his books have been sold worldwide.

He lives in Madrid.

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Thanks: MARGARET JULL COSTA, MARÍA LYNCH, ANNA KELLY,
CAROLINE PRETTY, ELLIE SMITH

Cover illustration by TUCKER NICHOLS

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On That Fiction Feeling and Lambchop

I REMEMBER IT HAPPENED when I read part of *Runaway* by Alice Munro, specifically the three linked short stories ‘Chance’, ‘Soon’ and ‘Silence’. I remember the names of the North London streets I was compelled to walk – from Messina Avenue to Woodchurch Road to Green-croft Gardens – just to free myself from the sensation that had blossomed within me after I set down the book. During that walk, the neighbourhood seemed raw and responsive. I was unsettled, but in the best possible way; I was in the midst of experiencing the kind of sadness that can only be induced by fiction, which is more potent sadness than most. Also in this jumble of sensation brought on by Munro was a vow to live better, to somehow dodge the mistakes of her characters. There was a bit of a ‘what the hell am I doing with my life?’; a bit of a ‘pay attention to the details’; a bit of an ‘appreciate life more’. In short, the great inner churning that comes at the end of a few extraordinary pieces of fiction. I’m far from immune to the way fiction works on human physiognomy. You fear it’ll happen, you hope it’ll happen, you can’t believe how *physical* it is when it does happen; and then you dispel it, street by street. I don’t know why anyone would hope to be inoculated against this sensation. I love to be reminded of the potency. It makes me want to examine the guilty object, bend the cover, flip it over, flick the pages, remind myself it’s only paper. (I haven’t yet felt this way with a Kindle.)

In preparation for the release of the twenty-third issue of *Five Dials*, I went and borrowed a copy of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa’s *The Leopard* from the library. It’s an old orange hardback, reinforced along the spine with strips of transparent tape. Back in 1987 it was presented to the library by the novelist Anita Brookner. This edition, published by Collins Harvill, contains the translated text of the novel as well as two short stories – nearly the whole of Lampedusa’s contribution to literature. I didn’t even begin the stories tucked at the back. I couldn’t. It was only about forty-five

minutes after finishing the novel, when I was far from home, somewhere on a dark street in Camden, that I felt a little less suffocated by the feeling left in me by *The Leopard*, particularly the final two chapters, which somewhere along the walk had made me palpably aware of my eventual death (Arlington Road), desperate to see my family (Delancey Street), and happy still to be alive and able to pick out the occasional star (Parkway), even if the ones above me were mostly blocked by London’s wash of sodium lights, and even if my knowledge of the constellations was paltry compared with that of Don Fabrizio, the great and tragic prince, the Leopard himself.

There isn’t much in this issue of *Five Dials*. Sometimes – as long-time readers know – we give over an entire issue to a single writer. The bar is high. Last time we relinquished control, the issue was placed in the capable hands of Orhan Pamuk. This issue features a single essay by one of our favourite writers, Javier Marías, whose latest novel, *The Infatuations*, is currently being translated by the incomparable Margaret Jull Costa. (Look out for it in spring 2013 in Hamish Hamilton). Speaking of the effect of fiction on physiognomy – EFP – try reading Marías’s last collection of stories, *While the Women are Sleeping*, without feeling your skin prickle during a few disturbing moments in the title story. You will never treat sunbathers on the beach in the same way.

At some point, years ago, Marías read *The Leopard* and, unlike some of us who simply wandered down streets in Camden, he wrote an essay on the particular genius of the novel, and the way the book seems heavier than most, weighted with the wisdom of an entire life. I envy any of you *Five Dials* readers who know nothing of Marías or Lampedusa. From this humble starting point, your journey will hopefully include the following stops on its itinerary: a page from now you’ll get to the Marías essay, which will inevitably lead you towards *The Leopard* (as well as Marías’s own work), and perhaps *The*

Leopard will lead you to your own dark streets, standing in front of a row of houses, wearing a too-thin coat, feeling the weight of its lessons, aware that it is so much more than a story of crumbling Sicilian aristocracy.

We here at *Five Dials* haven’t just been wandering; we’ve been at work on other projects. The next bumper issue of the magazine is taking shape and will include stories on Greece, a food festival in Aber-gavenny, *Mein Kampf* and Abraham Lincoln, and we’re also planning the release of the first *Five Dials* record – a 10-inch slab of vinyl, a double-A side, featuring one of our authors, Hollis Hampton-Jones, on one side reciting part of her novel, *Comes the Night*, backed by members of the epic Nashville band Lambchop, who have given us a remix of a song from their latest album, *Mr M*, to put on the other side. We’ve been listening to the Lambchop contribution for weeks. It has a more direct effect than a novel, especially since it’s nearly a disco track. Buy a record player. The record will be done soon, pressed soon, whatever the term is. (We make books.) As a favour, we asked Hollis to give us more information on how this Nashville/*Five Dials* project came about, and how she involved Roger Moutenot, producer on some of our favourite albums, including Yo La Tengo’s *I Can Hear the Heart Beating As One*. Here’s an explanation from Hollis:

‘I’ve long been jealous of musicians,’ she wrote in a recent email. ‘Being married to one, Stone Jack Jones, I’ve spent countless hours witnessing the playground-like environment of Roger’s studio, where they’ve recorded four records together. In the studio, I mix drinks and look on with both pleasure and envy as they build songs. Occasionally, Roger, in his exuberance, has handed me percussion instruments to play, and I’ve been able to experience the joy of playing with other musicians, even if my part generally gets deleted from the final mix.’

‘Musicians are my close friends and play a large part in my inspiration for the solitary process of writing. It is with them that I discuss what I’m working on, the mood of it, my own excitement and frustrations. So when I was asked to do a reading from my nov-

el at the Port Eliot Festival last summer, I saw my big chance to do what I'd been longing to do – collaborate with a musician. I knew that Ryan Norris, with whom I established a strong friendship through teaching him German after he fell in love with a girl in Berlin while touring with Lamb Chop, is a master of creating atmosphere. (Amongst the members of Lamb Chop, Ryan is called “the Professor”, for his professorial bearing and intense focus, punctuated at times by remarkably distinctive bursts of laughter.) He read my book, we sat on the back porch sipping vodka and deciding which scenes to work on. This took about ten minutes. Then I told him about the recording of Apollinaire reading “Le Pont Mirabeau” that I had found online; I couldn't get it out of my mind while I was writing the book. He listened to it and immediately came up with a melancholy progression of chords on his guitar that perfectly reflected the haunted feeling that the recording had evoked in me. That was our starting point.

‘The next time he came over, Ryan brought his guitar and Ace-Tone keyboard (a delicate instrument:

he keeps a blow-drier on hand to finesse the finicky wires into connectivity). We briefly wondered if we should discuss our approach more or just try to do a run-through, and opted for the latter. I told him that we had twenty-five minutes for the reading, so I started my stopwatch. We blazed through the whole thing, with Ryan moving back and forth between guitar and keyboard, and on the last note, which incorporated the Apollinaire recording, I stopped the timer: 25:00.

‘Reading with him at Port Eliot allowed me to respond to his musical responses to my words, and he set the tone to transition from one segment to the next. I got to use my speaking voice as an instrument (which I seem to have a greater capacity for than the guiro or the djembe) and when we returned to Nashville, we decided to record our piece with Roger.

‘Roger's studio is a place that decrees spontaneity. The atmosphere is warm, from the wood floors that Roger laid himself, with sand underneath them to absorb sound, to the low lights, candles and vintage furniture.

There are rows of beckoning guitars, boxes of percussion instruments, a small pump organ, a Hammond, a 1940s vibraphone, a baby grand, crib toys with bells to ring and clicking phone dials, masses of pedals and neatly coiled wires, and even an Edison gramophone that his grandfather used to record. With his shock of silver hair and lanky, agile frame, Roger is always in motion. If you sit down in a chair that you like, are comfortable with your drink and cigarette, he'll set up a microphone there.

‘And so it went. With Ryan at my side, we recorded one section at a time with small breaks in between, pretty much recording live. To have this so beautifully documented was immensely satisfying to me, but Roger wasn't through.

“Hey!” he said. “Let's do a dub remix version of this!”

‘When we came out of the studio, just across the train tracks where the Nashville Sounds baseball stadium is located, spectacular fireworks burst in the air above the guitar-shaped scoreboard.’

—CRAIG TAYLOR



EMILY ROBERTSON

Hating *The Leopard*

Javier Marías

Translated by Margaret Jull Costa

THERE IS NO SUCH thing as the indispensable book or author, and the world would be exactly the same if Kafka, Proust, Faulkner, Mann, Nabokov and Borges had never existed. It might not be quite the same if none of them had existed, but the non-existence of just one of them would certainly not have affected the whole. That is why it is so tempting – an easy temptation if you like – to think that *the* representative twentieth-century novel must be the one that very nearly didn't exist, the one that nobody would have missed (Kafka, after all, did not leave just the one work, and as soon as it was known that there were others, as well as *Metamorphosis*, any reader was then at liberty to desire or even yearn to read them), the one novel that, in its day, was seen by many almost as an excrescence or an intrusion, as antiquated and completely out of step with the predominant 'trends', both in its country of origin, Italy, and in the rest of the world. A superfluous work, anachronistic, one that neither 'added to' nor 'moved things on', as if the history of literature were something that progressed and was, in that respect, akin to science, whose discoveries are left behind or eliminated as they are overtaken or revealed to be incomplete, inadequate or inexact. But literature functions in quite the opposite way: nothing that one adds to it erases or cancels out what came before; rather, new books sit alongside earlier books and they coexist. Old and new texts breathe in unison, so much so that one wonders sometimes if everything that has ever been written is not simply the same drop of water falling on the same stone, and if, perhaps, the only thing that really changes is the language of each age. The older work still has to 'breathe', despite the time that has elapsed since its creation or appearance; and some works – the majority – are erased or cancelled out, but this happens of its own accord, not because something else comes along to take their place or to supplant or eject them; rather, they languish and die because of their own lack of spirit or – more precisely –

because they aspired to being 'modern' or 'original', an aspiration that leads inevitably to an early senescence or, as others might say, they become 'dated'. 'It's very much of its time,' we tell ourselves when we read these books in a different, later age, because, given the unstoppable and ever-accelerating speed with which the world moves, 'in a different age' can sometimes mean a mere decade later. This is the case even with stories written by some of the great modern authors, such as Kafka, Faulkner, Borges on occasions and Joyce almost always. They can sometimes seem slightly old-fashioned or, if you prefer, dated, precisely because they were so innovative, bold, confident, original and ambitious.

The same cannot be said of Isak Dinesen or of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*. The latter is not in any way an old-fashioned nineteenth-century novel as some critics said at the time, misled perhaps by the century in which the action takes place. It is, without a doubt, a contemporary novel of the kind written by the authors mentioned above, and its author was fully aware of the new techniques and 'advances' in the genre, if you can call them that, and was even modest enough to abandon one possibility – that of describing a single day in the life of Prince Fabrizio di Salina – saying: 'I don't know how to do a *Ulysses*.' But he did know, for example, how to make masterly use of ellipsis, telling a story in fragmentary fashion, unemphatically, even withholding information and leaving unexplained what the reader need only glimpse or intuit, setting up illuminating connections between disparate and apparently secondary or merely anecdotal elements, adroitly bringing together what the characters say and do with what they think (all of which is much more common in the twentieth-century novel than in the novel of the nineteenth century), and, above all, he observes, reflects, suggests and qualifies.

As we know, *The Leopard* was very nearly never published at all, and its author did

not live to see it in printed form; indeed, only a few days before his death on 23 July 1957, he received another rejection letter from one of the best Italian publishing houses, which thus added its short-sighted 'critical perceptions' to those of another no less prestigious house. More than that, though, *The Leopard* might never have been written at all. Lampedusa was not a writer, and proved to be one only after his death; and he began writing his novel in the last years of his life for, it seems, entirely trivial reasons: the relative late success of his cousin, the poet Lucio Piccolo, which led Lampedusa to make the following comment in a letter: 'Being absolutely certain that I was no more of a fool than he, I sat down at my desk and wrote a novel'; another reason was his wife, Licy, who encouraged him to write – to write anything, with no pretensions to greatness – simply as a possible way of neutralizing his deep-seated nostalgia; a third reason might have been his solitude: 'I am a person,' he wrote, 'who is very often alone. Of the sixteen hours of daily wakefulness, at least ten are spent in solitude. And being unable, after all, to read the whole time, I amuse myself by constructing literary theories ...' He did, in fact, spend most of his life reading and, when he went for his daily stroll around the city of Palermo, he always carried a briefcase with him, stuffed with far more books than he could possibly need. He even read (and he read in five or six languages) mediocre, second-rate authors, whom he considered to be as necessary as the literary greats: 'One has to learn how to be bored,' he said. So there was very little drive and scant ambition behind *The Leopard*. Indeed, as I say, it might never have existed, for Lampedusa himself had doubts about its timeliness and its value. On one occasion, he said to his pupil Francesco Orlando: 'It is, I fear, complete rubbish,' and he said this, apparently, without false modesty and in good faith. At the same time, though, he believed that it deserved to be published (which is not so very remarkable given how many books – good, mediocre and bad – were published in the twentieth century, not to mention all those that have already been published in the twenty-first century). In 'Last wishes of a private person', he wrote: 'I would like every effort to be made to publish *The Leopard* ... this

does not mean, of course, that it should be published at the expense of my heirs; I would consider that to be a great humiliation.' So while there was little drive and scant ambition when it came to beginning the task, at least there was a certain pride in finishing it.

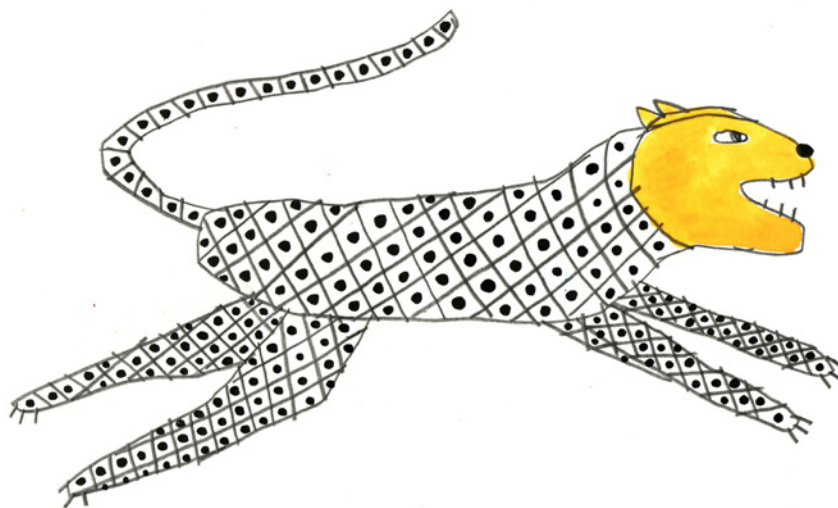
Lampedusa had good reason to feel proud. *The Leopard* is fresh and bold and free of any of the inhibitions that afflict novelists who feel an undue sense of responsibility towards themselves and their career thus far; it is entirely free of intellectual airs and vanities and of any desire to be original; it has no intention of dazzling or scandalizing or of 'opening up new paths'; on rereading *The Leopard* more than fifty years after it was first published and in another century, it seems to me to be a solitary masterpiece four times over: first, because it is the author's only

complete novel; second, because it appeared when he was already dead, and thus stepped out into the world so to speak, alone; third, because it was the work of an islander cut off from 'public' literature until his death; and fourth, because although it never aspired to originality, it is, nonetheless, extraordinarily original. Much

has been written about this novel since, and it would be presumptuous of me to attempt to add anything more. We can all agree that it is the pre-eminent novel about Sicily and about the unification of Italy; that it gives us a portrait of the end of an era and the death of a whole world, as well as a picture of opportunism as embodied in that famous and oft-quoted line: 'For everything to remain the same, everything must change' – repeated ad nauseam by those who have never read *The Leopard* – although those words are, in fact, just another fortunate phrase in the book as a whole and incidental to the plot. For me, it is, above all, a novel about death, about one man's prepara-

tion for and acceptance of death, even a certain impatience for it to come. Death stalks the book not in any insistent way, but tenuously, respectfully, modestly, almost as part of life and not necessarily the most important part either. Perhaps two of the most moving passages in the book are the Prince of Salina's contemplation of the brief death agony of a hare he has shot during a hunting party, and the final paragraph, in which, almost thirty years after Don Fabrizio himself has died, his daughter Concetta decides to relegate to the rubbish heap the stuffed carcass of a dog that belonged to her father and of which he was particularly fond, Bencicó.

Of the hare, Lampedusa writes: 'Don Fabrizio found himself being stared at by big black eyes soon overlaid by a glaucous veil; they were looking at him with no



reproval, but full of tortured amazement at the whole ordering of things; the velvety ears were already cold, the vigorous paws contracting in rhythm, still-living symbol of useless flight; the animal had died tortured by anxious hopes of salvation, imagining it could still escape when it was already caught ...' And of the dog he writes: 'As the carcass was dragged off, the glass eyes stared at her with the humble reproach of things discarded in the hope of final riddance,' and this leads the reader to remember another line, much earlier, in which he speaks of the world of Donnafugata as being 'deprived thus of that charge of energy which everything in the past continues to possess'.

Lampedusa knows that all things take a long time to disappear, that everything takes its time; even something that is already past lingers and resists leaving, even the stuffed carcass of a dog that departed this world decades before. And one can only oppose this slow, inevitable disappearance with a humble, but never rancorous reproach to the order of things. Anyone who knows or senses the existence of this order gradually becomes used to the idea and to the prospect of disappearing, even thinking of it as a 'salvation'. For example: 'he had achieved the portion of death that one can safely introduce into one's existence without renouncing life' and, elsewhere: 'Where there's death there's hope ...' This doesn't apply solely to places and animals, who do not understand (still less the eyes that are not even eyes, but the glass imita-

tions used by the taxidermist when creating the stuffed version of Bencicó). It applies to people too, most of whom are still unaware and full of life, still convinced that death is something that happens to other people, and yet who are still worthy of compassion. In the famous ball scene, he writes: 'The two young people drew away, other couples passed, less handsome, just as moving, each

submerged in their passing blindness. Don Fabrizio felt his heart thaw; his disgust gave way to compassion for all these ephemeral beings out to enjoy the tiny ray of light granted them between two shades, before the cradle, after the last spasms. How could one inveigh against those sure to die? ... Nothing could be decently hated except eternity.'

As he says at the end of the sixth chapter: fifty or more years are a mere instant 'in the region of perennial certitude'. Perhaps it is long enough, though, for all of us still living, still ephemeral novelists – blind, touching figures caught between two shades – to start earning the right to hate *The Leopard*. ♦